DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 178 994 CS 502 717

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TITLE A Survey of Attitudes toward Non-Academic Employment Areas and Perceived Employment Skills by SCA Placement Users at the SCA Convention, 1978.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (65th, San Antonio, TX, November 10-13, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Career Choice; *Employment Opportunities; *Employment Potential; *Employment Qualifications; Higher Education; *Occupational Choice; *Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Communication Research

ABSTRACT

Users of the placement service at the 1978 Speech Communication Association (SCA) convention were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine overall interest in nonacademic employment, specific interest areas of nonacademic employment, and perceived employment skills. Of the 241 questionnaires handed out, 141 were returned and 100 were used in the analysis. The results reveal that 54% of the SCA members who used the placement service were interested in nonacademic employment. These participants were most interested in consulting, research techniques and analysis, management, and personnel work. The users rated themselves most skilled in public speaking, interpersonal communication training, and small group communication. (Author/RL)

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ED178994

A Survey of Attitudes Toward Non-academic Employment Areas and Perceived Employment Skills by SCA Placement Users at the SCA Convention, 1978

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As early as 1917 an article titled "Speech Training for Business Men" was published in the Quarterly Journal of Speech. Since its publication a number of teachers in the field of speech communication have been concerned with the applicability of the discipline to job situations outside of academics. In recent years this concern has intensifed as there are a limited number of jobs available for students with graduate degrees. Investigations have focused on the problem from a number of perspectives. Some articles have focused on the curriculum and how it might better prepare a student for work in the non-academic setting.[1] Another approach to applying speech communication skills to non-academic settings has been to determine what speech communication skills are of most use in the business-government world.[2] Other research has focused on establishing contacts with non-academic employers.[3] Finally, others have focused their interest on preparing the student to seek non-academic employment.[4] The results leave the impression that not enough is being done to help speech communication graduate students find jobs in non-academic employment areas.

While the academic institution and its faculty can provide the course work and the opportunity for contact with the non-academic world, it is actually the student who must make the contact, communicate his/her skills, and persuade the employer to hire him/her. Arnold, as well as others working in this area, have agreed that placement is generally considered to be primarily the student's responsibility.[5] But unlike the student's situation in an educational setting where his/her credentials are in a familiar format and understood by his/her potential employer, in the non-academic setting the need for the student to be an articulate spokesperson and a successful persuader is much more pressing. Taylor and Buchanan's study of business and governmental agencies involved in recruiting college gradu-

ates found that communication majors were believed by the respondents to be needed in a number of specific areas. The authors, however, indicate:

> "No one... listed a need for a communication specialist to solve communication problems. The omission of this vocational specialty suggests that business and industry may be inadequately informed concerning training in the field of communications."[6]

Thus, to be successful in securing non-academic employment, the student must have the courses, the opportunity to make contact with non-academic employers and the ability to effectively communicate his/her background. To communicate effectively the students must know which skills, experiences, and background are important to the potential employers as well as have the communication skills to convince employers. Teaching students both which skills, background and experiences are important and how to communicate effectively to potential employers about these skills can be considered part of the institution's responsibility to the student. While discussing advising students about careers and the advisor's role as educator, Attaway comments, "Somewhere along the way we must show our students how they can apply what they have learned in the formal classroom setting."[7] To assess the interest in and preparation for non-academic employment, the researchers decided to complete a survey on graduate students.

Procedures

The Placement Center Questionnaire was designed to determine interest levels in non-academic employment and the individual's perceived employment skills. Interest in non-academic employment positions was used as the independent variable. Other demographic variables were used in this study but

are not germane to this article. The questionnaire was designed by the co-chairpersons of the Placement Center for the Speech Communication Association Convention, 1978. Dr. Jane Blanenship, President of SCA, wrote the introduction for the questionnaire. Members of the SCA Placement Service who utilized the Center at the convention were handed a questionnaire as they entered the center's area, asked to complete it, and to return it. Approximately 241 questionnaires were handed out and 141 returned (59%). Forty-one questionnaires were only partially completed and were not used to analyze the data.

Research Questions:

1. What are the interest levels in non-academic employment?
2. What are the perceived skills in communication areas?
3. Do speech communication graduate students who indicate that they are interested in non-academic employment have different interest levels in various non-academic employment areas than other groups?
4. Do speech communication majors who indicate they are interested in non-academic employment have different perceived skills than other groups?

Results:

The general results of this study indicate that 54% of those completing the entire questionnaire were interested in non-academic employment. Thirty-two percent were not interested in non-academic employment and 14% were uncertain about their interest. A breakdown on the surveyed population shows that they were evenly divided between those reporting their highest degrees as MA's and those reporting PhD's (45 respondents in each group), with 10 reporting their highest degrees as BA's. The proportion of those

indicating interest, non-interest, or uncertainty within each of these sub-groups was remarkably similar.

A more detailed analysis of the data explored respondents' interest in 15 areas of non-academic employment and their perceived skills in 10 areas of speech communication (see Tables 1 and 2). Chi square analyses were completed to determine differences in interests and skills among the subgroups in relation to preference for non-academic vs. academic employment and uncertainty. Significant differences occurred among these sub-groups in rating interests in political communication and management. In the area of perceived skills, significant chi squares were found among subgroups with respect to interpersonal communication, broadcasting, intercultural communication, and training.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that a majority of SCA Placement members who utilized the Placement Service at the 1978 SCA Convention were interested in non-academic employment. Thirty-two percent, however, were not interested in non-academic employment. The raw data indicate consulting, research techniques and analysis, management, and personnel work were the basic areas of non-academic employment interest. Participants also were asked to list types of companies with whom they would like to work. These results revealed such companies as IBM, General Motors, federal and state government, student personnel, Honeywell, television stations, and family services. This generated list by participants seems to reenforce the interest in consulting, management, research and broadcasting.

The results of the perceived skill variables indicate participants from

each group believe they are skilled in interviewing, interpersonal communication, small group communication and public speaking. Those who indicated interest in non-academic employment rated themselves high on the following skill variables: interviewing, conflict management, organizational communication, training and public speaking. These skills appear to be quite important to non-academic employment areas.

On the basis of this study, a major help to speech communication graduate students seeking non-academic employment would be to provide them with more information about initial employment opportunities and the skills most helpful for those opportunities. Such knowledge would help students to become more informative and persuasive about their abilities in interviews with potential employers. It must be noted that this study is limited and the hypotheses should be tested on larger, more representative samples. Furthermore, career alternatives and skills should be more carefully defined.[8] Finally the questionnaire might be expanded to include information on how much occupational counseling students want and currently receive,[9] and what students rely on to prove their perceived competencies.

Relatively few academic opportunities exist for graduate students receiving degrees in speech communication. As a result, students should develop interests and skills in non-academic areas, and instructors should help them prepare to perform in non-academic settings. The review of literature and results of this study indicate that additional research is needed to understand the role of non-academic employment for speech communication graduates. Obviously, if the speech field is to prepare people for non-academic jobs, various types of career programs in communication need to be

developed at colleges throughout the United States. Overall the curriculum should be designed to develop competencies needed for a successful transition into the business world. As King indicates:

> "Accountability in higher education is a common theme these days... we should rise and fall on the marketability of our product--just like people in any other organization."[10]

The role or roles of the SCA Placement Service in this "rise and fall" should continue to be explored and developed.

TABLE 1

Chi Square Analysis of Interest in Non-Academic Employment Areas

Non-Academic Employment Areas	Interest in Non-academic Employment	Unintersted	Undecided	Interested	X^2
Sales	Yes	33	7	14	6.63
	Don't Know	12	2	0	
	No	25	3	4	
Public Relations	Yes	25	4	25	7.63
	Don't Know	3	4	7	
	No	17	5	10	
Consulting	Yes	7	3	44	4.23
	Don't Know	2	3	9	
	No	6	4	22	
Persuasion/ Rhetoric	Yes	20	11	23	3.43
	Don't Know	4	1	9	
	No	8	7	17	
Political Communication	Yes	18	12	24	11.20*
	Don't Know	3	2	9	
	No	17	10	5	
Speech Writing	Yes	21	11	22	1.18
	Don't Know	5	3	6	
	No	13	9	10	
Personnel	Yes	13	14	27	5.62
	Don't Know	5	2	7	
	No	15	7	10	
Management	Yes	18	11	25	10.08*
	Don't Know	2	7	5	
	No	11	3	18	
Health Communication	Yes	27	8	19	4.34
	Don't Know	8	1	5	
	No	18	8	6	
Legal Communication	Yes	24	13	17	1.77
	Don't Know	7	2	5	
	No	17	8	7	
Technical Communication	Yes	26	15	13	4.17
	Don't Know	9	4	1	
	No	21	7	4	
Written Communication	Yes	16	12	26	4.72
	Don't Know	5	3	6	
	No	15	9	8	

Table 1 (continued)

Non-Academic Employment Areas	Interest In Non-academic Employment	Uninterested	Undecided	Interested	X^2
Research Techniques & Analysis	Yes	10	15	29	2.61
	Don't Know	4	2	8	
	No	7	5	20	
Evaluation Research	Yes	14	18	22	2.70
	Don't Know	5	6	3	
	No	8	9	15	
Labor Negotiation	Yes	16	9	29	8.82
	Don't Know	8	2	4	
	No	17	7	8	

*Significat at the .05 level

TABLE 2

Chi Square Analusis of Perceived Skill Areas in Speech Communication

Skill Areas	Interest in Non-academic Employment	Unskilled	Limited Skill	Skilled	X^2
Interviewing	Yes	8	18	28	6.74
	Don't Know	6	5	3	
	No	7	12	13	
Interpersonal Communication	Yes	7	14	33	11.56*
	Don't Know	1	5	8	
	No	2	1	29	
Broadcasting	Yes	28	13	13	10.43*
	Don't Know	9	4	1	
	No	23	9	0	
Persuasion/ Rhetorical Criticism	Yes	18	15	21	6.97
	Don't Know	3	5	6	
	No	16	11	5	
Organizational Communication	Yes	11	25	18	4.73
	Don't Know	4	8	2	
	No	12	13	7	
Conflict/Labor Negotiation	Yes	17	23	14	3.77
	Don't Know	8	4	2	
	No	11	15	6	
Small Group Communication	Yes	8	20	26	2.92
	Don't Know	4	11	6	
	No	5	11	16	
Intercultural Communication	Yes	22	19	13	11.95*
	Don't Know	6	5	3	
	No	23	9	0	
Training	Yes	7	18	29	13.20*
	Don't Know	3	7	4	
	No	14	9	9	
Public Speaking	Yes	4	9	41	4.60
	Don't Know	0	1	13	
	No	2	9	21	

*Significant at the .05 level

[1]Kathleen M. Jamieson and Andrew D. Wolvin, "Non-Teaching Carrers in Communication: Implications for the Speech Communication Curriculum," Communication Education, 25(November 1976), 284-291. Robert N. Hall, "Educating Speech Graduates and Undergraduates for Career Other Than Teaching," Bulletin of SCA: Assoc. of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication, January 1976. Richard B. Gartrell, "Career Education and the Communication Professions: A Central States Impact Survey," Central States Speech Journal, 27(Summer 1976), 156.

[2]James C. Bennett, "The Communication Needs of Business Executives," Journal of Business Communication 8(Spring 1971), 8., James A. Belohov, "Communications: A View from the Inside of Business," Journal of Business Communication, 1974. K. Phillip Taylor and Raymond W. Buchanan, "Vocational Marketability of Communication Competencies," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 38(Spring 1973), 285-291. Also see: James H. McBath and David T. Burhans Jr., Communication Education for Careers, 1975(ERIC-ED 111 045) and Diane Lee Lockwood and Sara Boatman, "Marketability: Who Needs Us? and What Can We Do for Them?" CSSA Convention Paper, 1975 (ERIC-ED 117 768)

[3]David T. Burhans Jr. and Paul C. Gaske, "Establishing Employment Relationships with Business and Government Hiring Agents." SCA Convention papers, 1975 (ERIC-ED 116 250). Robert L. Heath, "Employer Images of Speech Communication Majors: A Question of Employability," survey conducted by Department of Speech, University of Houston in Houston area, 1975 (ERIC-ED 113 770). Corwin P. King, "Developing Non-Academic Employment Prospects in Organizational Communication," Bulletin of SCA: Assoc. of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication, 21(August 1977), 63-65.

[4]Edward H. Sewell Jr. and Jean H. Speer, "Undergraduate Professional Seminar for Career Planning," Communication Education. 254-257. R. Primrose, "A Planning Guide for the Placement of Speech Communication Graduates," Bulletin of SCA: Association of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication, 14(October 1975). William E. Arnold, "Career Placement in Speech Communication," Bulletin of SCA: Assocation of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication, 13(August 1975), 3-16. Thomas L. Attaway, "Career Option Awareness," Bulletin of SCA: Association of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication, 21(August 1977), 66-68.

[5]Attaway, 68.

[6]Taylor and Buchanan, 290.

[7]Attaway, 66.

[8]See Communication Education, 25(November, 1976). This issue consists of several articles that focuses on non-academic employment for speech communication majors.

[9]Gartrell, p. 156.

[10]King, p. 65.